

# JUMPING TO CONCLUSIONS

*by Rabbi Yissocher Frand*

## Rabbi Frand on Parshas Acharei Mos-Kedoshim

*These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: Tape # 280, Lo Sa'amod al Dam Re'echa. Good Shabbos!*

**Dedicated This Year Le'eluy Nishmas Chaya Bracha Bas R. Yissocher Dov - In memory of Mrs. Adele Frand**

### A Haunting Thought About Jumping To Conclusions

This week's Parsha contains a positive Biblical commandment, which we often do not think about as such. The Talmud [Shavuot 30a] gives two different interpretations of the verse [pasuk], "With Justice you shall judge your fellow man" [Vayikra 19:15]. According to one opinion, this verse is giving direction to Judges. When a person comes to a Din Torah [Judgment in a civil case according to Torah law] the judge must treat the litigants equally. He is not allowed to have one litigant stand and the other one sit, one speak at length and the other urged to speak briefly, and so forth. However, according to a second interpretation in the Gemara, the verse is directed at every Jew. Its intent is that we must judge our fellow man favorably, always giving him the benefit of the doubt.

In other words, "Give your friend the benefit of the doubt" is not "merely" a teaching from Ethics of the Fathers, it is an explicit verse in the Torah! If we see a person doing something that apparently seems to be an act that he should not be doing, there is a full-fledged Biblical command to give him the benefit of the doubt. This is something which is codified by the Rambam, by Rabbeinu Yonah,

and by the Chofetz Chaim: A person who we know to otherwise be outstanding and upright must be given the benefit of the doubt. This is not just so that we can be considered "charitable". This is a positive Torah commandment.

In addition, there is a practical advantage that a person accrues by judging his fellow man positively. The way in which a person treats and judges his friend is the way that he will be judged in Heaven. The Mishneh [Avos 3:16] teaches that "Nifrain min ha'Adam m'daato v'shelo m'daato" a person receives his punishment in ways that he knows about and in ways that he does not know about. The Ba'al Shem Tov (1698-1760) explains the idea that a person will be punished without his knowledge (shelo m'daato) as follows: If a person witnesses an incident involving his fellow man and jumps to the conclusion that his friend is a thief, a liar, a wicked person - the "witness" will be judged similarly in the World of Truth.

Rav Pam cites a famous story of Dovid HaMelech [King David], who took Bas Sheva as his wife. Bas Sheva had previously been the wife of Uriah the Chittie. (Uriah was in the army of Dovid, where the practice was that soldiers going out to battle would first divorce their wives.) Despite the fact that she was technically not a married woman, our Sages note that this was an unbecoming act on the part of Dovid HaMelech.

Nosson HaNovi [Nathan the Prophet] came to Dovid and told him a hypothetical story of a rich man and a poor man. The poor man had only one little sheep, while the rich man had everything. The rich man, however, came and took this sole possession of the poor man away from him. Nosson asked the King for a ruling in this situation. "Dovid became very angry and said 'As G-d Lives, this man who did this is deserving of death!'" [Samuel II 12:5]. The prophet then responded "You are that man." He declared that Dovid would be judged according to his decree in the hypothetical case. "The very same sword that you proclaimed upon him will come back to haunt you and your household."

The Baal Shem Tov says that this dialogue between Dovid HaMelech and Nosson HaNovi is exactly how it will happen to each of us in the World of Truth. We will come before the Heavenly Court and we will be given a 'hypothetical case' to judge. We will be told "There was this person and he did such and such. He desecrated G-d's Name; He was not honest; and so forth. What is his fate?" We will show righteous indignation and offer all the appropriate condemnation of such a person. We will proclaim him deserving of harsh punishment. And then we will be shown that we, in fact, committed all of these sins and that we just declared our own fate.

That is the result of being unwilling to give people the benefit of the doubt. Such an attitude will eventually come back to haunt us. This is the meaning of the Mishneh that says that a person will be punished "without his knowledge". We would not have imagined that this particular trait of ours would come back to haunt us and seal our own fates.

The Gemara [Shabbath 127b] records that "One who judges his fellow man favorably, will in turn be judged favorably". This is more than "measure for measure"; this is just the way it happens. The way

we 'rule' (pasken) about others - the same words, the same approach - is the way that we will be judged.

The next time that we have a doubt about someone, let us not immediately jump to conclusions. It is well known that people often like to jump to conclusions, specifically regarding the more distinguished members of the community - the Rabbis, the Torah Scholars, the leaders of the community. The "bigger" one is, the more people are apt to jump to the opposite conclusion rather than giving them the benefit of the doubt. However, one day this tendency will, Heaven forbid, come back to haunt us.

### **Every Stoning Has A Silver Lining**

The last words of Parshas Kedoshim are "And any man or woman who becomes involved with Ov and Yeedoni [people who attempt to bring back the spirits of the dead] shall be put to death. They shall pelt them with stones, their blood is upon themselves (demeihem bam)" [Vayikra 20:27].

What happened to the generally accepted principle that a Torah Portion does not end on a negative topic? We usually do not even end an Aliyah [individual section of Torah reading] on a sour note. However, Parshas Kedoshim, which begins with the glorious words "You shall be holy...", ends with the stoning of people involved in this form of witchcraft - demeihem bam!

The Imrei Shammai makes an interesting observation. He says that the words "demeihem bam" are in fact a positive note. If a person is punished for his sins in this world - even via a violent death of stoning - at least he will then face the prospect of being eligible for Paradise in the World to Come, rather than facing the specter of having to experience Gehinnom. This should be considered positive. "Demeihem Bam" indicates he has achieved atonement in this world. His slate will be clean as he approaches the World of Truth.

The Imrei Shammai buttresses this idea with a verse from Melachim [Kings] and an amazing passage from the Jerusalem Talmud. When Dovid HaMelech was about to die, he instructed Shlomo [Solomon] to take care of all of his enemies. Yoav ben Tzeruya had been Dovid's Chief General. In the end, he rebelled against Dovid. Dovid instructed Shlomo, "Do not let him go to the grave peacefully" [Melachim I 2:6]. Rashi comments, "Do not allow him to die a natural death and thereby fall into Gehinnom." Dovid wanted him to be killed, not out of vengeance, but as a favor. He should die violently and thereby achieve atonement for his sins here, so that he will be eligible for reward in the World to Come.

Sometimes people suffer terribly before their death. It is extremely painful even to witness such suffering. We must bear in mind that sometimes this experience can be a 'favor' for the person. This is the lesson of the end of Parshas Kedoshim. 'Demeihem Bam' is not a sour note!

The Talmud Yerushalmi [at the end of Tractate Terumos] relates that Rav Imi was captured by bandits. Upon hearing this news, Rav Yochanan said, "Go purchase shrouds for him". However, Reish

Lakish cut a deal with the bandits and freed Rav Imi. Reish Lakish then convinced the bandits to come see Rav Yochanan, who would pray on their behalf in appreciation for freeing Rav Imi.

Reish Lakish brought the bandits in to see Rav Yochanan. The bandits were expecting a tremendous 'Mi Shebeirach' [blessing]. Rav Yochanan told them that "Whatever you were planning to do to Rav Imi, should happen to you". They left Rav Yochanan and were killed on the way home.

What happened? Did Rav Yochanan and Reish Lakish double-cross them? No. Rav Yochanan gave these fellows a tremendous blessing. They ended their lives having just performed an act of kindness and they received atonement for all their sins. They were now eligible to go straight into Gan Eden. This is the correct interpretation of the Yerushalmi. Sometimes a blessing can be that, unfortunately, a person needs to die.

That is the way that our parsha ends. The Baal Ov and Yeedoni do have to die - but at least this execution will serve as an atonement and as their ticket into the World to Come.

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Transcribed by [David Twersky](#); Seattle, Washington.  
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